AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Please amend claims 1, 6 and 7 as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A next process-determining method, comprising:

digitizing a sample object into digital sample data;

compressing the digital sample data into compressed digital sample data having a predetermined data format;

calculating a difference value between a size of the compressed digital sample data and a size of reference data formed by digitizing and compressing a reference sample object in the same manner as the sample object is processed;

identifying which of a plurality of predetermined numerical ranges the difference value corresponds to in order to determine whether a defect exists; and

determining a predetermined process associated with the identified numerical range in advance as a next process to be carried out.

6. (Currently Amended) An inspecting method that picks up an image of an object to be inspected, digitizes the picked-up image to image data formed of pixel data, and determines a next process based on the image data to execute the next process, comprising:

compressing the image data into compressed image data according to a predetermined data format in which an amount of compression depends on an amount of similarity within the image data;

calculating a difference value between a size of the compressed image data and a size of reference data formed by digitizing and compressing a reference picked-up image in the same manner as the image of the object to be inspected is processed;

identifying which of a plurality of predetermined numerical ranges the difference value belongs to in order to determine whether a defect exists;

determining a predetermined process associated with the identified numerical range in advance as a next process to be carried out; and

carrying out the predetermined process.

7. (Currently Amended) An inspecting apparatus, comprising:

a data processor that compresses image data obtained by picking up an image of an object to be inspected and digitizing the picked-up image, according to a predetermined data format in which an amount of compression depends on an amount of similarity within the image data;

a storer that stores a plurality of numerical ranges associated in advance with predetermined processes, and a size of reference data formed by digitizing and compressing a reference picked-up image in the same manner as the image of the object to be inspected is processed;

a calculator that calculates a difference value between a size of the image data compressed by said data processor and the size of the reference data stored in said storer; and

a controller that identifies which of the plurality of numerical ranges stored in said storer the calculated difference value belongs to in order to determine whether a defect

exists, and carries out a predetermined process associated with the identified numerical range as a next process to be carried out.